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SUBJECT: RUDD HOLDS SUMMIT OF THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Kevin Rudd convened a summit of 1000 of Australia's "brightest and best" on the weekend of April 19-20 to discuss ways of addressing long-term challenges facing Australia. The high-profile summit, "Australia 2020," produced a number of proposals, many of which were in reality slight variations of old ideas such as reforming the Federal structure, Australia becoming a republic (which received the most applause from the delegates), reviewing federal and state taxes, banning marketing of junk food to children, and a treaty with the Aborigines. The summit appears to have been a political success for Rudd, bolstering his image as a consensus politician open to new ideas from non-politicians. While most of the proposals are unlikely to be adopted, Rudd has promised to respond to all the ideas presented at the Summit by the end of the year. END SUMMARY.

RUDD'S SUMMIT

12. (U) On April 19-20. Rudd co-chaired a summit of 1000 of Australia's "best and brightest" at Parliament House, Canberra, to respond to long-term challenges facing Australia. The attendees included human rights lawyers, academics, celebrities (such as Cate Blanchett and Hugh Jackman), indigenous rights activists, Republic supporters, the elderly, and labor delegates. When he announced the summit on February 3, Rudd said "for too long Australian policymaking has been focused on short-term outcomes dictated by the electoral cycle. If Australia is to effectively confront the challenges of the future, we need to develop an agreed national direction that looks at the next 10 years and beyond." The summit was divided into ten groups of 100 which focused on "10 critical discussion areas." Each group was tasked with coming up with three proposals.

THE IDEAS

13. (U) At the opening of the summit, Rudd promised the Government would responding to each of the recommendations presented by the end of the year. At the summit's conclusion, each group presented its findings. Proposals included:

- a process to move to an Australian republic (this received the biggest applause),
- increasing formal recognition of Aborigines, with the possibility of a treaty,
- an "opt-out" scheme for organ donations (organs automatically donated unless you opt out),
- creation of a "community corps" to allow students to reduce their HECS (the equivalent of student loans) through volunteer work,

- a national preventative health care agency funded by taxes on cigarettes, alcohol and junk food,
- a review of federal and state taxes,
- a Federation commission to review the roles of federal, state and local government,
- the Government would use all its tools - spending, tax, regulation, and investment - to address pressing environmental issues like climate change,
- delivery of child care, pre-schools, schools and child health services from single center (proposed by Rudd prior to the Summit),
- every government department to divert one percent of its budget into arts funding,
- greater investment in the teaching of Asian languages,
- present a report on the state of the US/Australia alliance every three years, and
- a rights-based labor mobility program for the Pacific.

OLD IDEAS BUT MORE WORK FOR MINISTERS

14. (SBU) COMMENT: With all the policy work government ministers are already doing through the Council of Australian Governments' agenda - much of which overlaps the proposals from the Summit - they will now have to examine and report on every Summit proposal by the end of the year. Critics of the Qevery Summit proposal by the end of the year. Critics of the Summit, notably former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer,

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pointed out that the governance panel was intentionally stocked with pro-Republic delegates. Be that as it may, the call for a Republic may have created a momentum that will be difficult to stop. Some of the more practical ideas, such as a one-stop shop for child care and children's health services, are already being tested by the states. While child health plus day care in one location is an interesting proposal, the press has already noted that the cost to roll it out nationwide would be astronomical.

15. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: The Summit, as a means of building grass roots support for policy ideas early in a new administration, is something "New Labor" politicians like Tony Blair had already pioneered. Rudd will need to show that the Summit actually produced some useful policy proposals without letting more divisive issues like the Republic build-up too much momentum.

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